

LOLA'S T600 GROUND-EFFECTS SPORTS-PROTOTYPE SERIES



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A glimpse into the Interscope pits at Daytona, 1982.

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Daytona 1982, Danny Ongias' Lola T600 leads John Paul Jr. in the radical JLP4 Porsche with John Fitzpatrick's Joest-built Porsche 935/78 "Moby Dick" Porsche in third place.

Lola has had a long association with building long distance sports prototype racing cars. Probably their best known car of all was the Lola T70, particularly in coupé form. The T70 was introduced in roadster form in 1964 and progressed through Mark I to III and IIIB versions until, by 1969, the coupé was a reliable, good handling and undeniably beautiful car.

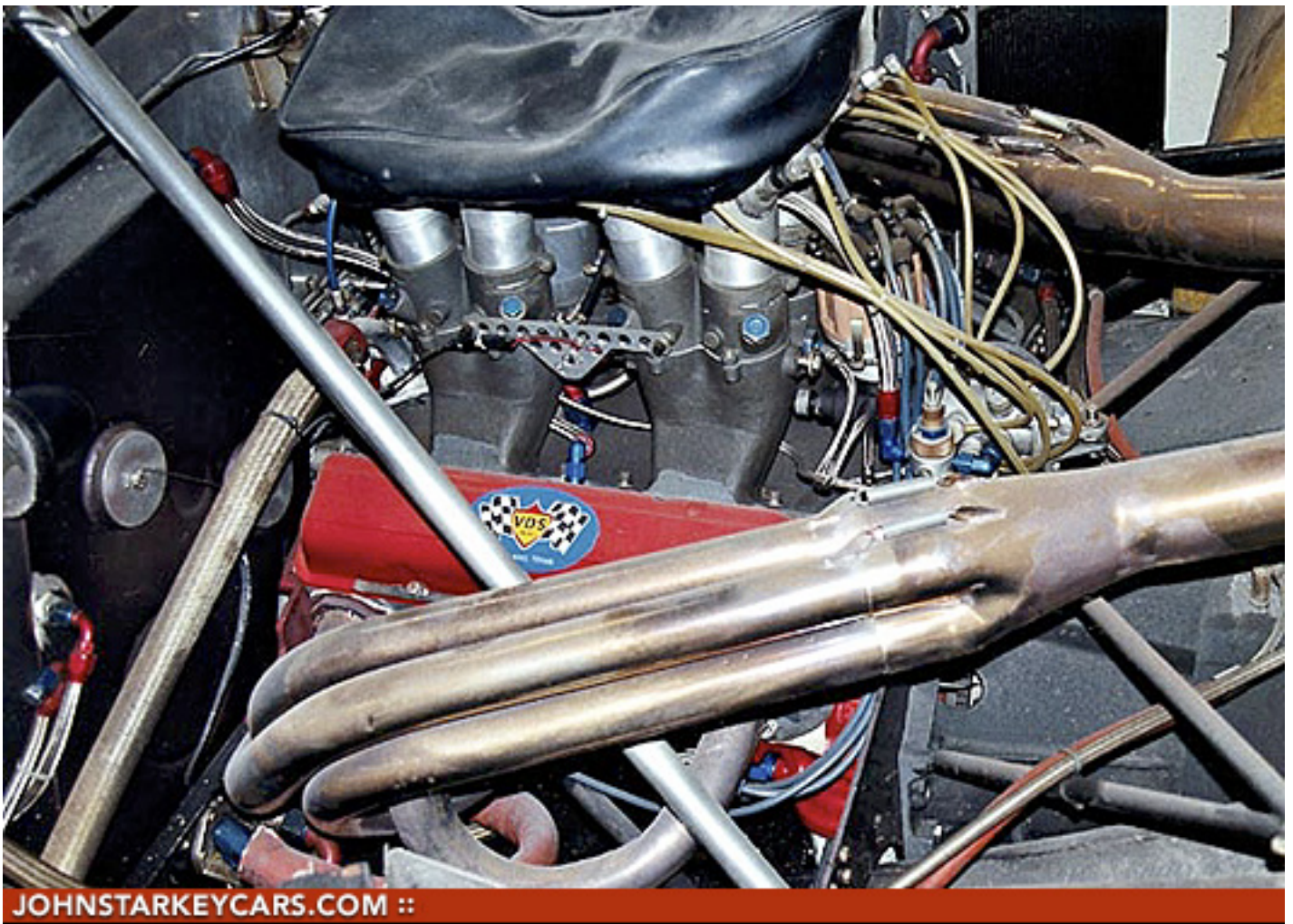
After 1969, when Lola was put in the shade by the all-conquering Porsche 917 and its Italian rival, the Ferrari 512 S and M, Lola stayed away from sports prototypes until 1980. Then Eric Broadley, Lola's Chairman, was invited by Brian Redman to try his hand at developing a car for the new GTP class in IMSA (International Motor Sports Association) racing in America.

To backtrack a little, IMSA had been dominated since 1974 by Porsche, first of all with the RSR Carrera and then with the turbo-charged 935. By 1980 John Bishop, the boss of IMSA, was looking to break Porsche's stranglehold on the series and constructed a set of rules to encourage a Chevrolet or Ford V8-powered sports prototype. Broadley saw that, with the advent of ground effects and new materials such as carbon fiber, he could construct a car good for over 200 miles an hour, whilst possessing ground-hugging capacity.

The result was the T600 and the car itself first raced on May 3, 1981. The first two cars were sold to the Cooke/Woods racing team and one of them caused a sensation when it appeared for practice at Laguna Seca with Brian Redman at the controls. Redman (who had been a Works driver for Porsche and Ferrari) stated, (regarding the T600) "This is the best prepared and designed new car that I have ever driven and I have driven a lot of new or experimental cars in my 20-odd years in the business." Brian lined up on the grid for the race in fifth place. Three of the Porsche 935s had qualified faster, being able to turn up the boost of their turbochargers in timed qualifying. The race itself, however, was a different matter as the 935s could not run at their full 1.4 bar boost. Neither could Klaus Ludwig, who was on pole position in the Team Miller Mustang Turbo. During the race, Brian steadily worked the T600 past the turbo cars ahead of him to win the Lola's inaugural race. In the process, he set a race lap record. Redman went on to win the next two races at Lime Rock and Mid-Ohio.

By July 26, at Sears Point, John Paul Junior had also taken delivery of a T600 and put the car on pole. Brian Redman finished second in the race to Klaus Ludwig with Paul in third place. On August 2 at Portland, John Paul Junior repeated the trick putting his T600 into pole position again but Brian Redman took the victory.

Redman finished the season as IMSA Champion and Lola sold a total of twelve T600s on the strength of this. Three of these cars were sold to the Interscope Racing Team of Ted Field, the heir to the Marshall Field fortune. It is one of these cars, chassis number HU-6, which we feature here. In 1982, Interscope scored four first places at Riverside, Daytona (twice) and Pocono. In addition, their T600s finished in second place five times and took two third places. After this, chassis number HU-6 was sold by Danny Ongais to noted Californian racing car collector Rick McLean, who in turn sold it to the present owner.



Typical 366-cubic inch VDS full race small-block Chevrolet used in the Lola T600.

The car has been completely restored and is today a joy to drive. As far as the technicalities are concerned, the T600 featured a riveted monocoque chassis with substantial roll over protection built in. The engine was usually the ubiquitous racing Chevrolet V8, usually in 366 cubic inch small block form. Using Lucas McKay fuel injection, this was good for some 620 horsepower. Two cars used the Porsche 935 engine. The gearbox was by British manufacturer, Hewland and was a 5-speed and reverse VG type. The bodywork of the T600 was a mixture of carbon fiber and GRP and underneath were shapely Venturis, which literally "sucked" the car to the ground at speed. Interestingly, these Venturis were somewhat too large, not allowing the T600 to exceed much more than 195 miles an hour at Le Mans, where the car should have been capable of 220 miles an hour plus on the Mulsanne Straight. Nonetheless, for the average medium speed American course, they worked well.



Glen Brown is seen here leading the pack at the Tustin Thunder Meeting in 1998 in an Interscope car.

By 1984 the T600 had become obsolete, beaten by another British product, the March (in 83 and 84G form). Ominously, Porsche was back on the scene with their very first monocoque-chassised sports prototype, the 962. Lola carried on developing sports prototypes with the T610 and later for Chevrolet. This car was known as the Corvette GTP. They were then contracted by Nissan and designed the R88, which in the hands of Geoff Brabham took four straight IMSA Championships from 1988 onwards. By this time, these turbo-powered sports prototypes had become incredible complex and costly. Despite being blindingly fast, IMSA scrapped the GTP class. Today, fans look back with nostalgia at the GTP era of IMSA and the equivalent Group C racing in Europe but with the advent of HSR, the cars are eligible to run once again. •••

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